

U.S.-CUBAN TALKS IN '63 DESCRIBED

Book Sees Kennedy Cautious
on Castro Move for Ties

By HENRY RAYMONT

A detailed account of President Kennedy's cautious but favorable response to overtures by Premier Fidel Castro of Cuba for a resumption of diplomatic relations is disclosed in a book to be published this month.

The secret diplomatic exchanges between the two Governments began in September, 1963, and ended with Mr. Kennedy's assassination.

Long withheld by former members of the Kennedy Administration, the details of the confidential talks appear in "The Reds and the Blacks" by William Attwood.

Mr. Attwood is editor in chief of Look magazine, and in the fall of 1963 served on the United States delegation to the United Nations. Before that he was President Kennedy's Ambassador to Guinea and subsequently he was appointed by President Johnson as Ambassador to Kenya.

The former diplomat's sudden involvement in talks with Cuba began during the United Nations General Assembly meeting in 1963.

"Although my title was Special Advisor for African Affairs . . . I also found myself involved, during most of the fall, in a diplomatic exercise aimed at normalizing Cuban-American relations," Mr. Attwood wrote.

Castro 'Looking for Way Out'

The diplomatic talks, he reported, were triggered by a report from the Guinean Ambassador to Havana suggesting that Premier Castro "was unhappy about Cuba's satellite status and was looking for a way out."

The report struck Mr. Attwood as plausible on the basis of additional information suggesting that Mr. Castro wanted an accommodation with Washington and of his own assessment that the Cuban leader was "too emotional to be a disciplined Communist."

Mr. Attwood said he believed that the situation warranted a "discreet contact" with the Cuban delegation. He said he conveyed his belief to the chief United States delegate to the United Nations, the late Adlai E. Stevenson, and to Ambassador W. Averell Harriman. He added:

"On Sept. 19, Harriman told me he was 'adventuresome' enough to favor the idea, but

suggested I discuss it with Bob Kennedy because of its political implications. Stevenson, meanwhile, had mentioned it to the President, who approved my talking to Dr. Carlos Lechuga, the chief Cuban delegate, so long as I made it clear we were not soliciting discussions."

Terms Not Proposed

Mr. Attwood suggested that the Administration never explicitly proposed the terms of a settlement beyond reiterating its official position, that Premier Castro should sever all military ties with the Soviet Union and Peking and renounce his proclaimed attempts to subvert other Latin-American governments.

However, the book strongly suggests that the Kennedy Administration agreed with his estimate that a deal was possible.

Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr. briefly alluded to this period in his book "A Thousand Days." He wrote: "I have the impression that in the autumn of 1963 the President was reappraising the Castro problem."

Mr. Attwood, whose book will be published by Harper & Row on March 16, seemed to outline for the first time the actual diplomatic moves on which this reappraisal was based.

Talks With Castro Suggested

When he discussed the matter with Dr. Lechuga, Mr. Attwood continued, the Cuban diplomat suggested "there was a good chance" of arranging a private talk with Mr. Castro in Cuba.

But Robert Kennedy, who had been named by the President to follow the Cuban situation, proposed that representatives of the two Governments might first meet in Mexico, Mr. Attwood reported.

Meanwhile, Lisa Howard, a television reporter who was in Cuba at the time, had talked to Maj. René Vallejo, Premier Castro's personal aide, who offered to arrange a meeting between Mr. Attwood and the Premier in the latter's residence at Varadero Beach, the book said.

In a final passage about his confidential mission, Mr. Attwood strongly suggests that the attempts to reach a detente with the Castro regime were ended by the President's assassination. Recounting his last meeting with Dr. Lechuga, who has since been shifted to the Cuban Ministry of Culture, he said:

"He had received instructions from Castro on Nov. 23 to enter into informal discussion with me. But he assumed the situation had changed. I said I didn't know. But I informed [McGeorge] Bundy and later was told that the Cuban exercise would probably be put on ice for a while—which it was and where it has been ever since."

Mr. Bundy was a foreign policy adviser to President Kennedy.